



# SMILES FOR MILES

*the Premier Access guide to oral health*

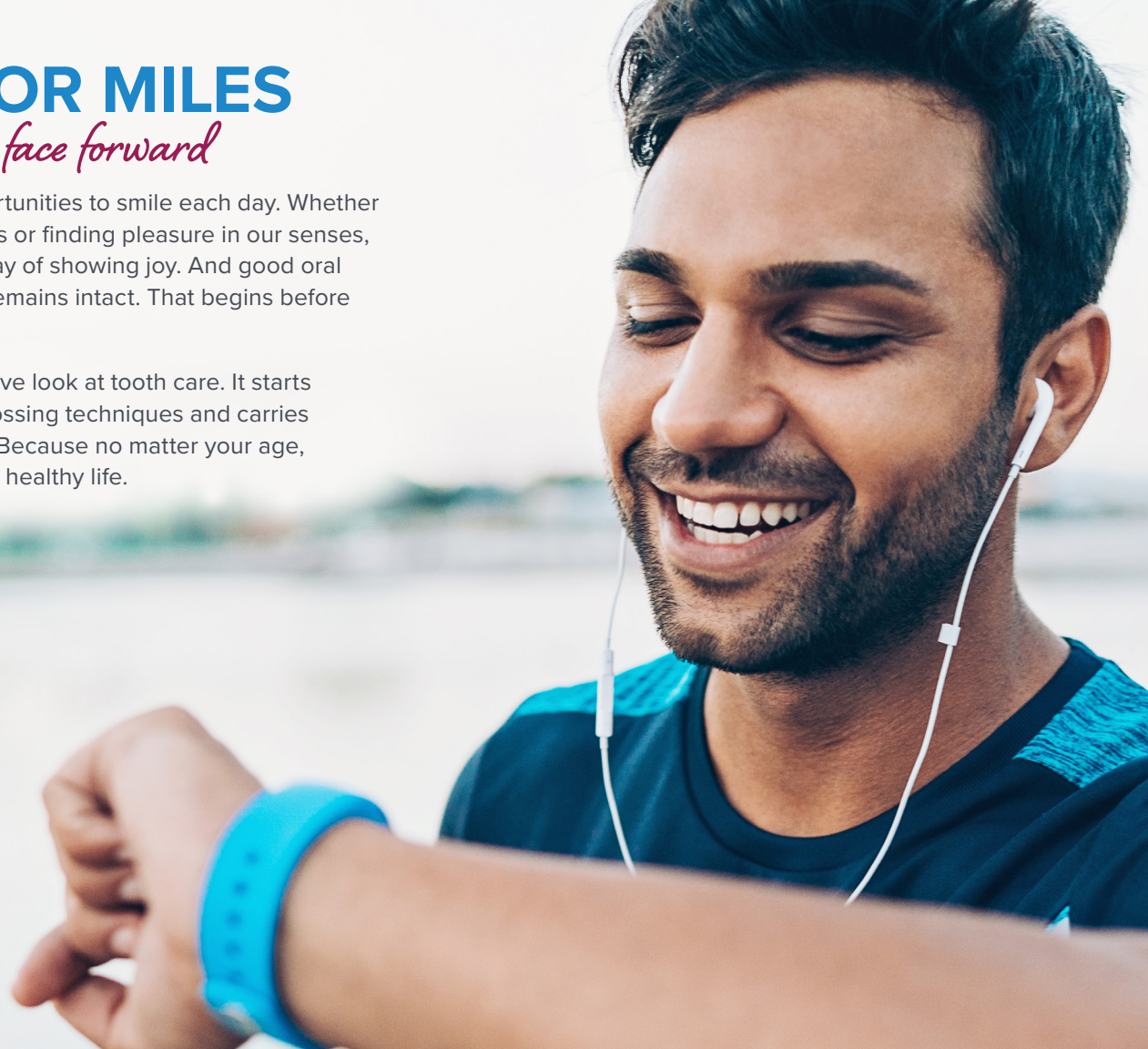



# SMILES FOR MILES

## *putting your best face forward*

Life gives us plenty of opportunities to smile each day. Whether we're celebrating milestones or finding pleasure in our senses, a toothy grin is our face's way of showing joy. And good oral hygiene can ensure that it remains intact. That begins before the first tooth.

This guide is a comprehensive look at tooth care. It starts with proper brushing and flossing techniques and carries you through infant to elder. Because no matter your age, a healthy smile is a sign of a healthy life.





The mouth is a window to the soul of your health. This sensitive place is often the first point of contact for germs and toxins. Fortunately, our mouths are also filled with mechanisms for sensing these intruders and doing battle.

The face and mouth hold clues to your health. They can reveal bone loss, drug use and addiction, domestic abuse, and more. An oral exam can lead to the discovery of hidden disease. And tooth decay itself can lead to serious health issues like heart disease, which can spread from untreated infections.<sup>1</sup>

So you see: good oral hygiene and regular checkups are integral to your overall health.

# BETWEEN THE TEETH

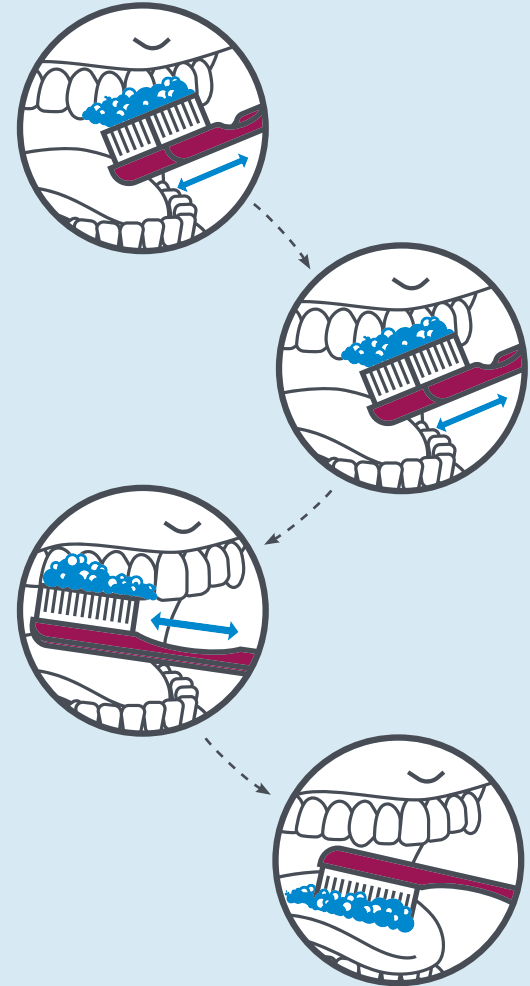
## *maintaining good oral health*

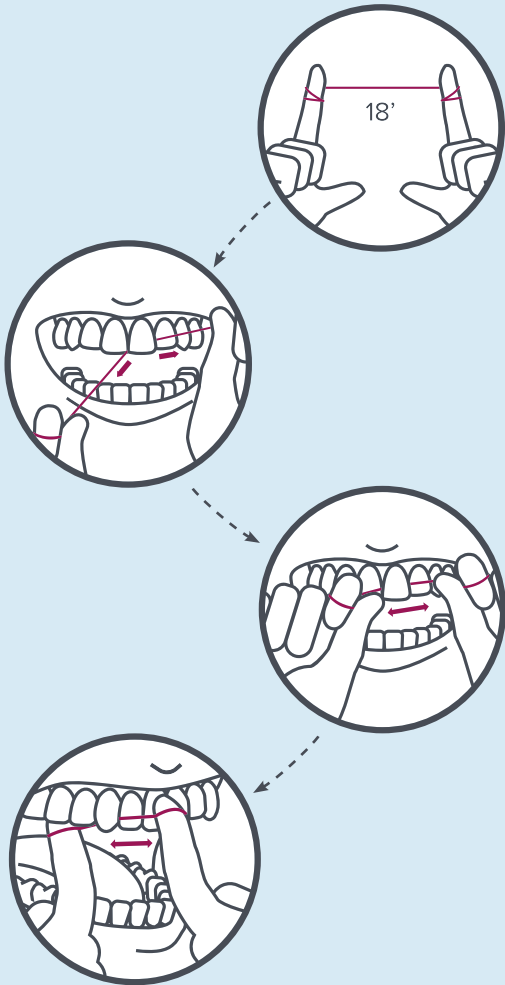
We can prevent *almost* all cavities. Yet dental caries, as they are called, are the most common disease among people aged 6 to 19. American adults are far from immune: 9 out of 10 over age 20 have tooth decay.<sup>2</sup>

Caries are caused by plaque, a sticky bacterial film that constantly forms on your teeth. Food and drinks with sugars or starches (soda, raisins, milk, candy, etc.) feed the bacteria. Then they create acids that break down tooth enamel. Their activities in the mouth cause plaque, which leads to cavities and to a reversible form of gum disease called gingivitis. Preventing tooth decay in the first place is simple; doing it right takes fewer than ten minutes a day.<sup>3</sup>

### BRUSHING TECHNIQUE<sup>4</sup>

1. Place your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle against the gums.
2. Move the brush back and forth gently in short (tooth-width) strokes.
3. Brush the outer tooth surfaces, top and bottom, first, then move to the inside surfaces using the toe of the brush and a gentle vertical stroke.
4. Brush your tongue to remove bacteria and freshen your breath.





## FLOSSING TECHNIQUE<sup>5</sup>

1. Cut a piece of floss—the ADA recommends 18 inches—and wind most around a middle finger. Wind the rest around your other middle finger. You'll wind the used floss around that one.
2. With the floss held tight between forefingers and thumbs, guide it between your teeth gently. Do not snap it into place, as it may cause your gums to bleed.
3. Curve the floss into a C shape against one tooth, and glide it gently under the gum.
4. Next, with the floss taut against the tooth, rub the floss gently up and down between teeth.
5. Floss between and around every tooth, including the back side of the four end teeth!

Some people have difficulty handling dental floss. Other inter-dental cleaners—like picks, sticks, and special brushes—can be used in its place; just be sure to ask your dentist about using them properly, not only to clean your teeth but to help you avoid gum injury.

## A FINAL RINSE

Want more protection than fluoride toothpaste alone? Add an antimicrobial mouth rinse to your routine.<sup>6</sup>

\*Note: Children aged six or younger should not use these rinses. (Read the label and talk with your dentist about fluoride rinses for use in children.)

Good oral hygiene is the difference between having teeth and losing them.





## ORAL HYGIENE TIPS

- Brush twice a day with an ADA-accepted fluoride toothpaste.
- Replace brushes every three to four months, sooner if bristles are frayed or you have been ill.
- Use an antimicrobial rinse to reduce plaque and gum disease risk.
- Eat a balanced diet and limit between-meal snacks. (Ideally, if you eat snacks, brush afterward!)
- Keep regular appointments for cleanings and exams.
- Ask about a sealant. This plastic coating can be applied to the chewing surfaces of cavity-free back teeth, where decay often starts.
- Clean between your teeth daily with floss or an inter-dental cleaner. Brushing alone won't catch everything that lingers between the teeth and under the gum line.

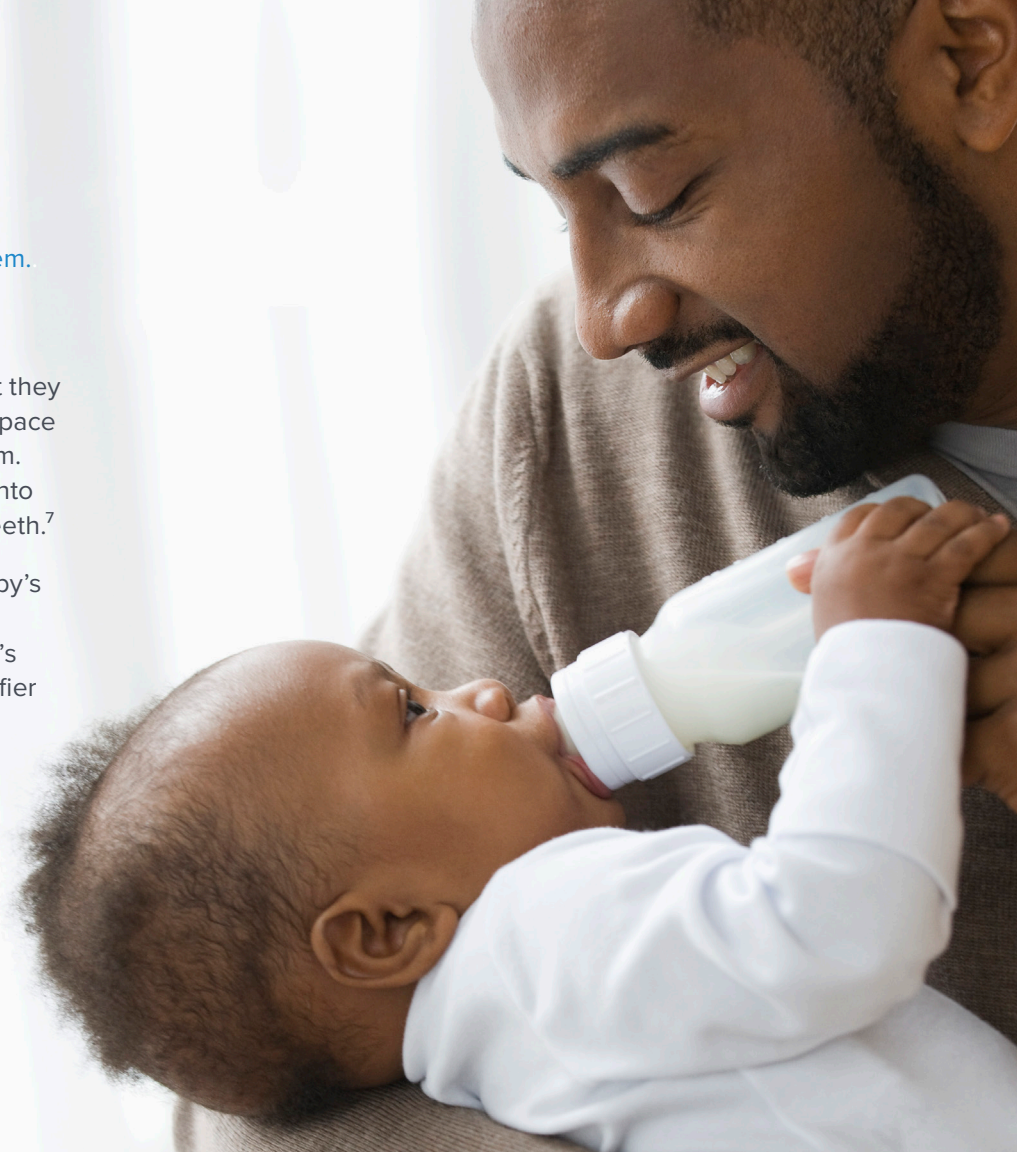
# LITTLE BITES

*caring for baby's mouth*

Our teeth are important even before we have them. That's why starting good bottle habits is the first important step in a lifetime of good oral health.

Baby teeth are at risk for decay from the moment they appear at about six months. Their job is to hold space in the jaw for the adult teeth that will replace them. When a tooth is lost too early, another may drift into the empty space, causing crooked or crowded teeth.<sup>7</sup>

Cavity-causing bacteria can be transferred to baby's mouth in many ways. One way is from caregiver to infant. This may happen when Mom puts baby's feeding spoon in her mouth or Dad cleans a pacifier in his mouth before passing it back to baby.







## **BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY**

Early childhood caries can contribute to tooth loss. This is known as baby bottle tooth decay. The name comes from the habit of putting babies to bed with a bottle to pacify them. While the child sleeps, sugary liquids (sweetened water, fruit juice, milk, formula, and even breast milk) pool around baby's mouth. Bacteria then feed on the sugars, producing tooth-eroding acids. Each time your baby drinks these liquids, acids attack for 20 minutes or longer. After several attacks, teeth can start to decay.<sup>8</sup>

The upper front teeth are most at risk for baby bottle tooth decay, but other teeth are not immune. Fluoride makes teeth more resistant to acids. So infants and toddlers who do not get enough may face increased risk. In some cases, they can develop such severe decay that teeth cannot be repaired and must be removed. But the good news is that tooth decay is almost completely preventable.<sup>9</sup>

## PREVENTION

The following tips should give your baby's teeth a head start for a lifetime of smiles.<sup>10</sup>

- Wipe baby's gums with a clean, damp gauze pad or washcloth after each feeding to help remove plaque and food that can harm teeth. You can brush new teeth gently using just water and a child-size toothbrush.
- Schedule your child's first visit to the dentist within six months of the first tooth's arrival but no later than the child's first birthday.
- Use bottles for breast milk, formula, or milk only. Don't fill them with juice, sugar water, or soft drinks.
- Allow infants to finish naptime and bedtime bottles before going to bed.
- Use clean, unflavored pacifiers; don't dip them in honey or sugar, and don't clean them in your own mouth.
- Do not put any items from your own mouth into baby's mouth.
- Encourage healthy eating habits. A diet rich in vegetables, fruit, and whole grains is best for baby and baby's teeth! Serve nutritious snacks and limit sweets.
- Use a pea-size amount of toothpaste after age two, when your child can be counted on to spit, not swallow, it.
- Ensure that your child has adequate exposure to fluoride. Discuss his or her needs with your dentist or pediatrician.
- Brush children's teeth for them until they are six years old.

Following these simple tips gets baby off to a good start. And don't forget your own oral health. Reducing the number of bacteria in your mouth benefits everyone.





A person wearing a light-colored jacket is sitting on a red, textured bench. In the background, there is a brick building with a window and a hanging light fixture.

# BIGGER MOUTHS

## *caring for older teeth*

Adult mouths are susceptible to plaque and cavities. But we face other tooth issues, especially when we didn't have a healthy head start.

As we age, our gums recede. And when that recession is combined with gum disease, roots can become exposed to plaque. Tooth roots are covered with a substance called cementum, which is even softer than enamel. More prone to decay, they are also sensitive to touch and temperature.

[Tooth root decay is common in people aged 50 and older.](#)

Decay around the edges, or margins, of fillings is also common in older adults. Often, it's because they lacked the fluoride and modern preventive dental care we have today. Fillings become weaker with age and can fracture and leak around the edges. This can lead to an accumulation of bacteria.

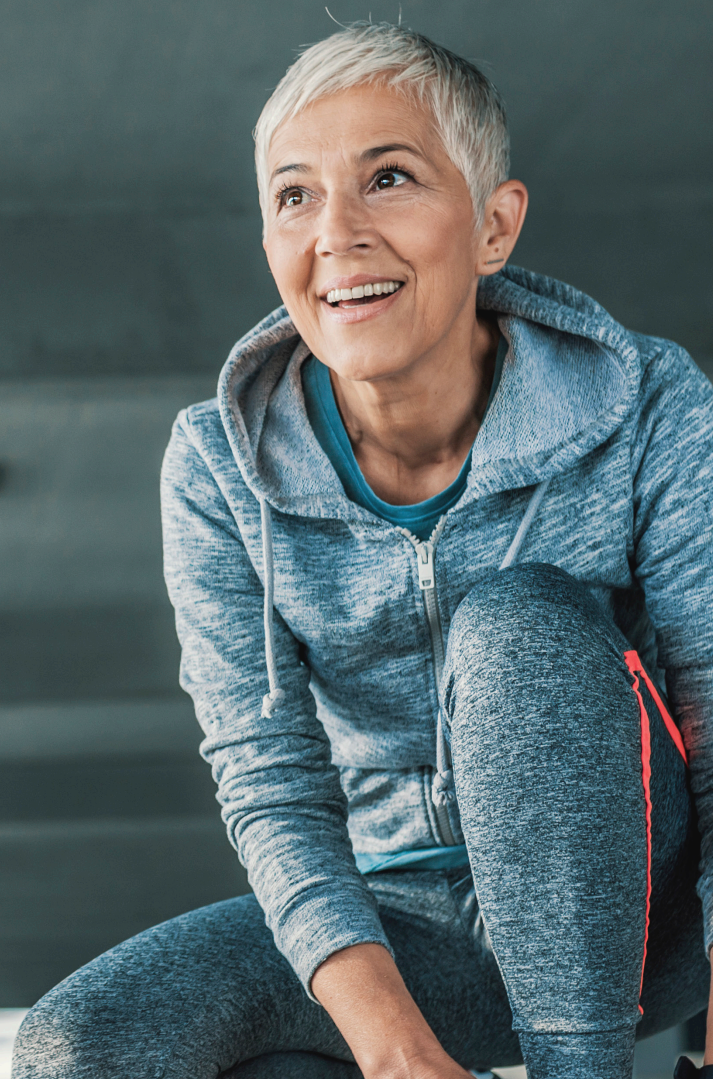
You can reverse some damage and prevent much more by starting a good hygiene routine right away. Brush, floss, and add a fluoride rinse to your routine for extra protection. Choose an over-the-counter anti-cavity rinse or a prescription rinse with more fluoride. These are not mouthwashes, which are for bad breath. The better choice is fighting the tooth decay that causes bad breath in the first place!"

# LONG IN THE TOOTH

*caring for the older mouth*

By the year 2030, the U.S. will be home to 72 million people aged 65 and over. That's 20 percent of the population.<sup>12</sup> And 17 percent of them have periodontal disease.<sup>13</sup>

Aging can affect oral health. Dry mouth, medications, bone loss, and more can increase our chances for cavities at the root, gum disease, and tooth loss. But proper care can minimize those risks.



## OTHER OLDER MOUTH PROBLEMS

- Gum disease
- Darkened or discolored teeth
- Dry mouth
- Root decay
- Inflamed, sore mouth (stomatitis)
- Uneven jawbone
- Thrush or oral candidiasis

## ORAL HYGIENE & DENTURE CARE

Follow proper hygiene techniques (see “Between the Teeth”). If you have dentures, however, take the following steps to remove bacteria and keep them free of stain.<sup>14</sup>

- Handle dentures carefully
- Remove and rinse after eating
- Use cold water, not hot
- Use toothpaste, gels, dish soap, or commercial dental tablets or pastes
- Keep dentures in water when not in use

## ADHESIVES

Denture adhesives hold dentures firmly in place, forming a seal to keep food from between dentures and gums. Saliva can often do the trick, too, if there is a sufficient amount to create the seal. Note: adhesives should not be used to correct ill-fitting dentures, as these can cause serious mouth discomfort and must be replaced or corrected as soon as possible.<sup>15</sup> Remove adhesive by scrubbing gently.

If you have a loved one of advanced age who suffers from cognitive impairment, including dementia, please ensure that caregivers are paying proper attention to dental hygiene, as these patients have an even higher risk of cavities, gum disease, and infection.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup><http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/SurgeonGeneral/sgr/chap5.htm>, February 2018  
<sup>2</sup>[https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/disease/dental\\_caries.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/disease/dental_caries.html), September 2016  
<sup>3</sup><https://www.bustle.com/p/11-foods-you-didnt-realize-were-hurting-your-gums-31222>, January 2017  
<sup>4</sup><https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/brushing-your-teeth>, accessed May 2018  
<sup>5</sup><https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/flossing-steps>, accessed May 2018  
<sup>6</sup><https://www.ada.org/en/member-center/oral-health-topics/mouthrinse>, September 2017  
<sup>7</sup><https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/baby-teeth>, accessed May 2019  
<sup>8</sup><https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/baby-bottle-tooth-decay>, accessed May 2018  
<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*  
<sup>10</sup><https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/life-stages/infant-oral-care/brushing-babys-first-teeth-0414>, accessed May 2018  
<sup>11</sup><http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/decay>, accessed May 2018  
<sup>12</sup><https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/acs/ACS-38.pdf>, October 2018  
<sup>13</sup><https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/research/data-statistics/periodontal-disease/seniors>, July 2018  
<sup>14</sup><https://www.mayoclinic.org/denture-care/expert-answers/faq-20058375>, November 2016  
<sup>15</sup><https://www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/common-denture-problems#1>, January 2016

*Material discussed is meant for general informational purposes only and is not to be construed as medical advice. Although the information has been gathered from sources believed to be reliable, please note that individual situations can vary. You should always consult a licensed professional when making decisions concerning oral health care.*

Premier Access Insurance Company is a wholly owned subsidiary of Guardian. Guardian® is a registered service mark of The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America, New York, NY. ©2019 Premier Access Insurance Company. ©2019 Guardian. All rights reserved. #2019-79503 (exp. 5/21)

